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13 February 1971

Central Intelligence Bulletin

CONTENTS



COMMUNIST CHINA - LAOS: Peking does not seem to have changed its policy of avoiding direct military involvement in the Indochina war. (Page 7)



PAKISTAN: Meetings of East Pakistani leaders may result in movement toward secession. (Page 11)



25X1

Approved For Release 2003/06/12 : CIA-RDP79T00975A018300010002-6

Next 8 Page(s) In Document Exempt

Approved For Release 2003/06/12 : CIA-RDP79T00975A018300010002-6

COMMUNIST CHINA - LAOS: Peking's current attitude toward allied cross-border operations in Indochina suggests no change in its effort to avoid direct military involvement in the war.

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[redacted] a Communist official [redacted] recently indicated that as long as allied incursions were restricted to southern Laos and Cambodia and did not threaten northern Laos, direct intervention by China was unlikely. The official implied, however, that any move into northern Laos might be considered a direct threat to China, and this or a "further deterioration of the situation" could raise the possibility that Chinese troops might be brought into the conflict.

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[redacted] Peking has throughout the conflict shown a continuing concern for the protection of its own border, and the official's comments are generally consistent with this attitude. The official specifically used the 17th parallel in Laos as a demarcation line, but this may be a means of conveying Chinese sensitivity regarding areas near its border, rather than representing a trip wire that would automatically trigger Chinese intervention if the line were crossed. Peking in any case probably does not expect the allied incursion to push above the parallel.

[Peking has had ample time to consider the implications of allied moves in southern Laos; it almost certainly has expected them for some time. Peking has adopted a measured reaction to recent developments and has avoided a high degree of belligerence. Although the Chinese have sustained a high volume of propaganda, none of their pronouncements suggests that they view the situation with immediate alarm. Peking's propaganda seems designed to dramatize its heightened concern as well as its eagerness to throw its public support behind Hanoi.]

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13 Feb 71

Central Intelligence Bulletin

7

The Chinese unquestionably hope to continue to avoid the risk of confrontation with the United States. At the same time, however, they are certainly prepared as before to provide needed material support for the Indochina war effort.

25X1.

13 Feb 71

Central Intelligence Bulletin

8

25X1

Approved For Release 2003/06/12 : CIA-RDP79T00975A018300010002-6

Next 1 Page(s) In Document Exempt

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PAKISTAN: [Meetings next week of East Pakistani political leaders may result in moves that could lead to eventual secession.]

The Awami League (AL), which recently swept elections in East Pakistan for a national constituent assembly, next week will hold meetings that will include the AL members elected to the assembly. [redacted]

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[redacted] at the final session of these meetings the party may unilaterally declare adoption of a constitution based on its own program for far-reaching provincial autonomy, unless by that time President Yahya Khan has set a date for convening the assembly. [redacted]

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[redacted] Yahya will soon announce that the assembly will convene on 1 March.

[Senior AL officials continue to seek foreign support for possible secession. The AL may only hope that word of its talks with foreigners may leak to Yahya and serve as pressure on him to select an early date and then to accept Bengali demands despite probable opposition from many West Pakistani politicians. Nonetheless, sentiment among East Pakistanis for separation from the west wing may be higher now than at any other time in Pakistan's history.]

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